Otakar Kudrna 1939–2021

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http://zoobank.org/09235DF1-CDE3-40A4-97BF-6B87B8E33BC1

Received 22 April 2021; accepted 22 April 2021; published: 28 April 2021
Subject Editor: David C. Lees.

Otakar Kudrna was born in České Budějovice in 1939, when this Bohemian city, known at the time as Budweis and always renowned for Budweiser Bier and for Koh-i-Noor, had 'recently' (1918) joined Czechoslovakia, following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nothing has ever been easy in town since then until recent times, starting immediately with the German invasion and occupation (1939–1945) and the many related horrors, its re-assignment to Czechoslovakia and the subsequent deportation of all German-speaking inhabitants.

Otakar's personal history was no less troubled than that of his city. With the establishment of the 'new' communist regime, his father, who seems to us, was a medical doctor, soon ended up in deep disgrace and Otakar narrowly managed to take advantage of the few days of the 'Prague Spring' to flee to England. Here he became a British Citizen and took a Masters' Degree in Cambridge with a thesis developed under guidance by Brisbane Charles Somerville Warren, whose work on the genus *Erebia* is especially well remembered. E. W. Classey published O. Kudrna's revision of the genus *Hipparchia*, derived from his thesis, in 1977.

Figure 1. Otakar Kudrna photographing the Moorland Clouded Yellow (*Colias palaeno*), from his own webpage (http://www.butterflies.de/Kudrna/kudrna_us.htm).

Otakar's interest in Roger Verity, whose Italian he never came to understand very well, arose from our (GL's) first meeting in Turin, when I hosted him in the early 1970s and showed him the five volumes of "Farfalle diurne d'Italia". I (GL) then told him about my military service (1961), about my two months' sojourn in Florence, at the Military Health School of Costa San Giorgio, near the Museum of "La Specola", and about my visits to Verity's collection, preserved in that Museum. Otakar did not forget to ask me, after a few years, to write for him a letter of introduction to Prof. Lanza, who was then Director. So Otakar began to frequent Florence, a city that he came to love (it reminded him of Prague). He stayed at "La Specola" on several occasions, starting, I seem to remember, from 1976 and until around 1980, also thanks to a series of small grants obtained from some British societies. The purpose of these visits was a revision of Verity's type material, which Otakar selected very carefully and which he re-boxed as a separate collection.

It was precisely at Specola that I (EB) met Otakar for the first time, on the occasion of one of my visits, then numerous, and it was he who prompted me to become an SEL member (1976), and to attend its first Congress, held in Paris in 1978. Otakar was an SEL founding member and Editor of *Nota lepidopterologica* from 1977 to 1980. Then he left due to a series of differences of which it is useless to tell.

A lasting friendship was established between us by a frequent exchange of letters. I (GL) indulged his wishes by accompanying him to visit some habitats that he particularly wished to see. These included the Novara rice paddies, to photograph *Lycaena dispar*, the heaths of the "Piano Rosa", where *Coenonympha oedippus* still abounds, the alluvial soils along the lower course of the Sesia river, (then) densely populated with *Zerynthia polyxena*, the steep slopes of Mount Kastel, in search of *Erebia flavofasciata*, the Laquinthal Alps, to photograph *Erebia christi*, and some of the colonies of this species that I had discovered on the Italian side of the border. He followed me with difficulty but with determination and subsequent satisfaction. He did not say, but I could tell from his gaze that betrayed his natural Teutonic coolness. In 1975, during my visit to the Aeolian Islands, I collected some *Hippparchia* of the *semele* group whose wing morphology and whose behaviour seemed to me different from usual. I sent him some specimens to study their genitalia. The answer was immediate: "it is a new species", which he would later dedicate to me (GL), *Hipparchia leighebi* Kudrna, 1976.

With the death of B.C.S. Warren (1979), who was perhaps his only British friend, Otakar was no longer happy in that country and, after a while, he finally went to settle in Germany, where he had already been engaged with the Alexander König Museum (Bonn) for couple of years. He finally took German citizenship and managed to have his English MD recognized. A position of curator had been opened at that Museum, and he thought of having a go at it. After his Florentine period, Otakar had resumed coming to Italy from time to time. He stayed at GL's either in Novara or in his country house on Lake Orta, or otherwise at EB's in Genoa. It was on one of these occasions that he told me (EB) an anecdote. One morning, climbing the stairs of the König Museum, the Director, who was behind him, told him: "Dr. Kudrna, you have dropped a tissue". And he, taking the packet out of his pocket, counted the tissues and replied: "It's not possible, there are 7 and I always carry 7 with me". He laughed a lot as he told this. Czech humour, maybe. One can surely imagine it was not (only) for that, but the curatorship went to someone else, and he lost the grant he had had with the Museum for several years.

Otakar then came to Genoa with a Visiting Professorship (1983–84 and 1984–85), to teach a course in Conservation Biology at the local University. Subsequently he received a small grant from the University of Catania, to monitor the butterflies of the Aeolian Islands, and he also went to Sardinia a few years later.

In the meantime, he had entered into a contract with "Aula Verlag" for the planned publication of an eight-volume work on "Butterflies of Europe" of which he was Editor. Unfortunately, only three parts were printed, between 1985 and 1990, those of a general nature, while volumes dedicated to taxonomy never saw the light, due to the failure of the Publisher and difficulties with the new management. The second volume, "Introduction to Lepidopterology", written in the form of separate articles, should not be missing from any student's library, although unfortunately not all the chapters turned out to be at the same level. In the 8th volume, written entirely by the Editor (Aspects of the Conservation of Butterflies in Europe), Otakar introduced a series of indices, including a "Range Affinity Index", aimed at evaluating how much a given species can truly be considered 'European' and therefore of conservation interest in Europe. Chris van Swaay and Martin Warren (1999), among others, adopted it for the compilation of the first "Red Data Book of European Butterflies".

Since my (EB's) tenure at the University of Turin (1987), he came to visit us once, I think it was 1991. Later, my wife Cristina Giacoma and I visited him in Germany (he had settled in Munich), during a period in which he had had a contract for the conservation of *Parnassius mnemosyne*. He very kindly also found a way to please Cristina, organising for us a visit an interesting Black grouse 'lek', and to a Capercaillie captive breeding site.

With the folding up of the "Aula" project, which greatly saddened him, Otakar moved onto another pet idea of his, that of publishing an atlas of the distribution of European butterflies. Three editions came out (2002, 2011, 2019), always with new updates and clarifications. He was very proud of it.

In retrospect, the times when he came to Italy quite often was probably the happiest period in his life.

Last Christmas (2020) we swapped good wishes. He replied also by sending a gift package to both of us, containing the fruit of his latest effort: "Distribution of Butterflies and Skippers in Europe, 2019".

Otakar Kudrna was a sometimes a very difficult person. I (EB) told him several times that he was his own worst enemy. I (GL) agree with Emilio but, as a medical doctor, I cannot ignore the weight of the psychological conditioning of a man isolated from his roots for years, without family affections, fleeing from occupied Czechoslovakia, leaving home and all possessions, in constant search for acceptation, first in England and then in Germany, always with poor job and financial prospects. I felt moved when he told me that on leaving his home, he only carried a bag with him containing two books on butterflies. All this partially justifies his tendency to recognise only his own reason, and the numerous disagreements with many colleagues.

We have always considered him a friend, with his strengths and weaknesses; we think we had been a bit of help to him and have learned a lot from him about the world of butterflies. We like to remember Otakar when, tired (perhaps on return from long entomological trip through meadows, woods and mountains), loved to toast dinner with red wine (Chianti, if at all possible), and/or with "il vero verissimo amaro Santa Maria del Monte" (a local bitter), both which he liked a lot, gradually slowing down his words, with his eyes at times turned backwards, until he fell asleep.

Now, like then, he did it again, forever.

Nobody can deny that Otakar has dedicated all his life to the passionate study of butterflies, shifting from taxonomy to conservation, and certainly always providing at least significant contributions.

We attach a list of his publications, which he had circulated to us some time ago, and from which probably only the latest edition of his Atlas is missing.

Emilio Balletto (EB) & Giorgio Leigheb (GL)

Otakar Kudrna: List of lepidopterological publications

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